

Seasonal High Tunnels for Food and Other Specialty Crop Production

March 2013

Seasonal High Tunnels is a project under the “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food” initiative for farmers to establish high tunnels to increase the availability of locally-grown produce in a conservation-friendly way.



Why Seasonal High Tunnels

A seasonal high tunnel is a polyethylene-covered structure at least 6 feet in height, which modifies the climate to create more favorable growing conditions for vegetable and other specialty crops grown in the natural soil beneath it. High tunnels can extend the growing season, increasing the potential for production of local foods nearly year-round.

Potential Resource Benefits of High Tunnels

Potential natural resource benefits from using tunnel structures include: (1) improved plant quality, (2) improved soil quality, (3) reducing nutrient and pesticide transportation, (4) improving air quality through reduced transportation inputs, and (5) reducing energy by providing customers with a local source of fresh produce.

Features of High Tunnels

Commercially available high tunnel structures are made in numerous widths and lengths. The high tunnels are constructed of metal frames that are covered with a minimum of 6 mil polyethylene. Generally, the end walls are framed-in to create door and ventilation areas. The high tunnel structure covers multiple crop rows; is wide enough to allow crop growth to full maturity under the tunnel; and is tall enough to allow spraying, cultivation and harvest to occur with the tunnel intact.

Financial Assistance for High Tunnels

High tunnel systems may be eligible for financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Financial assistance will be limited to tunnels covering up to 5 percent of one acre (2,178 square feet) per farming operation – equivalent to a structure size of approximately 30 ft x 72 ft. The seasonal high tunnel has an expected practice life of 4 years.

Additional Eligibility Criteria and Limitation for Participating in the High Tunnel Program

- Applicant must be an eligible producer.

- High tunnel sites must be approved by NRCS.
- **High tunnels are to be constructed to manufacturer's design and specifications. All designs must be reviewed and approved by NRCS prior to installation to ensure eligibility. Structures that do not meet *state-specific* specifications will not be funded, regardless of what the manufacturer claims.**
- All crop production must be done in the soil profile. No potted or containerized production will be allowed in these structures.
- No alternative uses for the high tunnel structure are allowed during non-growing season months-- no storage, no potted or containerized plant production, no housing of livestock or poultry.
- Participants will be responsible for operation and maintenance of these structures including clearing snow from on and around the high tunnel.

Need More Information? Contact Your Local USDA Service Center Listed Below

Androscoggin/Sagadahoc Counties

254 Goddard Road
Lewiston, ME 04241-1938
Tel: 207-753-9400

Aroostook County:

Central Aroostook
735 Main Street, Suite #3
Presque Isle, ME 04769
Tel: 207-764-4153

Southern Aroostook
304 North Street
Houlton, ME 04730-9527
Tel: 207-532-2087

St. John Valley
139 Market Street, Suite 106
Fort Kent, ME 04743-1425
Tel: 207-834-3311

Cumberland and York Counties

306 U.S. Route 1, Suite A1
Scarborough, ME 04074-9774
Tel: 207-883-0159

Franklin County

107 Park Street
Farmington, ME 04938-1915
Tel: 207-778-4767

Hancock County

1423 Broadway, Suite #4
Bangor, ME 04401
Tel: 207-947-6622 ext. 5

Kennebec and Lincoln Counties

Central Maine Commerce Center
21 Enterprise Drive, Suite #1
Augusta, ME 04330
Tel: 207-622-7847

Oxford County

17 Olson Road
South Paris, ME 04281
Tel: 207-743-5789

Penobscot County

1423 Broadway, Suite #2
Bangor, ME 04401
Tel: 207-947-6622, ext. 3

Piscataquis County

42 Engdahl Drive
Dover-Foxcroft, ME 04426-3717
Tel: 207-564-2321

Somerset County

12 High Street, Suite #3
Skowhegan, ME 04976-1998
Tel: 207-474-8324

Waldo and Knox Counties

266 Waterville Road
Belfast, ME 04915-1224
Tel: 207-338-1964

Washington County

Federal Building and Post Office
8 M & M Place, Suite 5B
Machias, ME 04654
Tel: 207-255-3995

www.me.nrcs.usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.